

# Value Change For Global Survival

I participated recently in a very informative conference—the General Assembly of the Global Forum and International Green Cross, chaired by Mikhail Gorbachev in Kyoto, Japan, which gathered political leaders, spiritual leaders, scientists and artists from around the globe to discuss the critical state of the world. One concern voiced repeatedly was a clear realization that the values currently directing the world, particularly the Western world, can no longer be the guiding factors if we intend to survive into the 21st Century. If everybody in India, China, Africa and South America had two gas-burning cars, our atmosphere would be gone in a very short time. If everyone had consumption rates like Americans (considering their poor domestic production rates), there would soon be little left to consume. We must reassess our values and goals and make adjustments for our life in the new century. Value systems that emphasize profit over humanity and profit over natural harmony can no longer be tolerated and ideals which stress material value over the quality of human relationships also should be unacceptable.

The discussion at the conference kept coming back to value, for it is your perception of value that motivates your actions and determines how you live. It is necessary and healthy to periodically reassess your values. You should never be afraid to rethink them. If, in reviewing them, you determine that they are sound, then you have just strengthened the basis for embracing them. If new information, new insight or new developments indicate that they are off, then you have an opportunity to adjust them so they can be better guides in the future.

So it seems that we are at that juncture once again—a time and place where it is imperative that we reconsider what is valuable. It amazes me that in a country supposedly based on mutual equality and respect, where it is forbidden (theoretically) to discriminate against people on the basis of sex, age, race, religion and a host of other things, it still appears to be acceptable to discriminate on the basis of economics. It seems to be a given that if one can afford it, then one should be allowed special privilege. "They paid for it," you may say. "One of the perks of capitalism," you say. The problem is, people have come to define almost everything based on monetary value—a very limited scope of value which will stifle human progress.

I think it is important to identify what we have that is valuable and determine how that value can be enhanced, directed, put to use and manifested to our best benefit, rather than allowing others to be the primary beneficiaries of our efforts and our valuable assets (like our energy, time, consumer spending, etc.).

In perusing the list of valuable assets, some things I consider important are: the value of self (self worth, self esteem and self confidence); human values (positive human characteristics like

courage and hope) and the value of your human energy (how you spend your time and energy and for whom); the value of family (as sources of love, physical and psychological sustenance, security and happiness); the value of the amount of time spent with family compared to the value of time spent "working;" the value of our heritage (our cultural reference point as Africans), the value of humanity itself and the value of life and living.

So on one end we have self awareness and individuality and on the other, the awareness of our interconnectedness. As we approach the essence of life, self, family, race, community, country and all other differences melt into the vast ocean of life. Our actions then really will be for the benefit of all life and our differences will become celebrated rather than condemned. We truly will realize that we all are one.

As leaders of our households we must define the direction, set the pace and be the example of how to live wisely and fruitfully so that we can make our families strong and happy. We must pass on values that are clear and practical. Our families should be sources of encouragement, rejuvenation, protection and love and our homes should be castles of kindness, pulsing with compassion. They should not be places of constant hostility and complaint, places that people dread coming home to. They must be the oasis, the haven from harm, not the breeding ground for it.

When I think about the state of the African-American family and the various values mentioned above, I am reminded of the profound simplicity of children as demonstrated in a discussion my five-year-old nephew was having with his parents. He said that he didn't want to be African. When asked why, he replied, "Because Africans are old." "Not all of them are old," he was told. "There are little boys and little girls who are African, too." His father went on to explain (in depth) the value of our culture and what is important about being African. After a lengthy explanation of the wonders of our heritage and why we should be proud that we are African Americans, my nephew, looking exasperated and growing tired of his father's lecture, shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't want to be African American, I just want to be a little boy." ■

